



The Highland Games: A great time to be Scottish – or at least pretend you are  
**NEWS | PAGE 8**

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## Kids from MV take to the mountains in July

By **KATHY BOYD**  
Features Writer

Water bugs and campfires in the wilderness became a real life experience for 14 Kulshan Creek neighborhood kids from Mount Vernon on the hottest days so far this summer.

The children, ages 8-14, and eight wilderness instructors spent two days and a night, July 7-8, learning about nature during the Kulshan Creek Neighborhood Kids Program Summer

Mountain School through the North Cascades Environmental Learning Center at Diablo Lake, east of Sedro-Woolley.

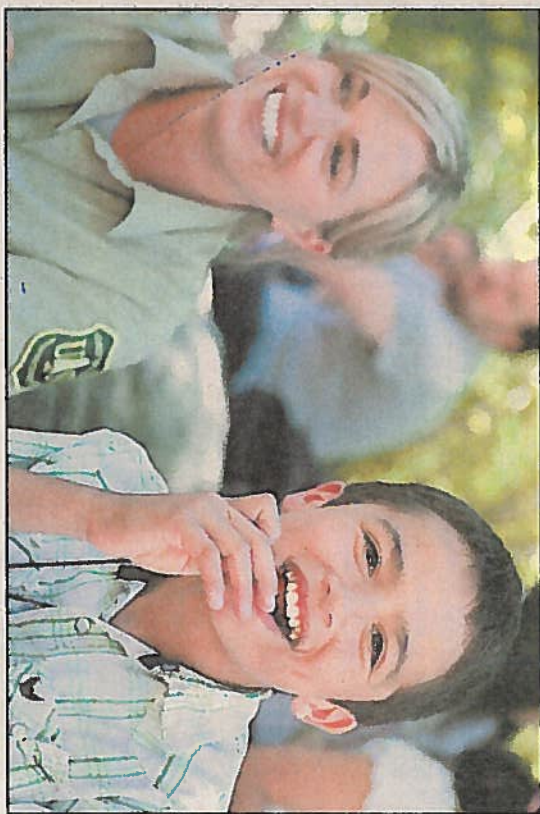
The Kulshan program began in 2007 in partnership with North Cascades Institute, National Forest Service, Mount Vernon Police Department and National Park Service.

U.S. Forest Service program coordinator Lee Whitford of Port Townsend said the mostly Latino youth in this group all struggle with

lifestyle complications at home such as gangs, parents with mental illness or drug addictions, parental abuse and crowded housing.

"They are great kids challenging at times, but those of us who have been working with the neighborhood for three years now adore them," she said by e-mail.

For two jam-packed days, the kids learned skull identification, observation skills and about water bugs and



**Andrew Villarreal, 11, of Mount Vernon** enjoys a laugh with U.S. Forest Service staff member Jessica McAloon in July at the North Cascades Environmental Learning Center in North Cascades National Park. Villarreal was one of 14 youth to participate in the Kulshan Creek Neighborhood Kids Summer Mountain School program.

Rick Allen / U.S. Forest Service

See **MOUNTAINS**, Page A2

## Mountains

a silent hike, reflection time  
and poetry writing."

A student named Bri-  
anna wrote a succinct verse:

*Nature  
nice fun  
amazing exciting funny  
tree free bird lake  
earth.*

Whitford said the kids  
struggled with the concept  
of making an unselfish  
wish, but eventually came  
up with one to write down  
in a group exercise before  
it was time to head home.  
Ice cream at Cascadian  
Farm near Rockport made  
the homeward trip a special  
occasion, she said.  
"We don't just provide  
unstructured and structured  
time in nature," Whitford  
said about the school. "We  
provide one-on-one adult  
interactions, a safe environ-  
ment and, in several cases,  
something as basic as three  
meals a day for this time."

wilderness animals.  
They even experimented  
with the way sound travels  
during an evening excu-  
sion to the Diablo Dam.  
"There was a lot of booting  
and hollering as we discov-  
ered the echo effect," Whit-  
ford said.  
Gathered around a  
campfire at the Lily Shel-  
ter, she said they sang silly  
songs, listened to stories,  
played games and one  
instructor played the guitar.  
After a short six hours of  
sleep, Whitford said every-  
one was ready to head out  
in the big canoe the next  
morning.  
"The lake was like glass"  
while the kids learned the  
basics of canoeing, she said.  
"While one group canoed,  
the other group set off for